Recruiting and Retaining Radio Volunteers

How to encourage participation in your organization.

About the Presenter

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  - Ham radio license since 1995
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  - Previously 911 dispatcher for 12 years
  - Previously SAR and Communications volunteer for 9 years

The Basics

- Every disaster requires more communication resources than we ever have available
- Ham radios are the best source for reliable communications
- Volunteers are the best source for ham radio operators

Find New Volunteers

- Contact existing license holders
  - Lookup by FCC database
    - http://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsApp/UlsSearch/searchAdvanced.jsp
    - Can search by city, zip code, lat/long, other
    - Download into spreadsheet
    - Send personalized letters
    - Effective for targeting newly licensed hams
  - Recruit at swap meets
  - Post on Internet discussion boards
  - Recruit from clubs that don't already have emergency communications component

Create New Operators

- Offer information sessions, classes, exams
- Recruit from existing emergency support organizations
  - Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
  - Police Volunteers
  - Fire Volunteers
  - Other voluntary organizations
    - WAVOAD (Washington Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster)
      http://wavoad.org

More New Operators

- Church organizations
- Senior Centers
- Service clubs
- Youth activity groups
  - Schools
  - Clubs

Be Flexible

- Be willing to involve people in your emergency communications plan even if they can’t attend meetings or other activities personally
- Volunteers can be a valuable asset even from their own homes.

Recruitment

- Have a clear process for people to become volunteers
  - May be different for voluntary organizations and government sponsored teams
- Follow your process
- Be clear about your expectations
- Understand the volunteer's skills, abilities, and interests

Sample Recruit Process

- Accept/process applications
- Conduct background check
- Interview potential volunteer
  - Clearly lay out expectations
  - Volunteer clearly spells out their interests
- Issue team/organization ID
- Invite to first meeting/training (if they're not already attending)

Keep Existing Volunteers

- Find out what they want to do
- Engage them in recruiting and mentoring new volunteers.
  - New volunteers often need some guidance
  - Existing volunteers are usually ready to provide it
- Act on their suggestions, to the best of your ability

Manage All the Volunteers

- Keep them engaged
  - Regular meetings
  - Training opportunities
  - Exercises as a team
  - Community involvement
    - There doesn’t have to be an emergency before your team can go to work!
  - Recognition and encouragement
    - Include a hierarchy if appropriate

Training Opportunities

- Train with other volunteer units in your vicinity
- Arrange for training classes on topics related to your mission
- Promote training classes being held by other organizations
- Set standards for minimum and more advanced training qualifications

Radio Specific Training

- ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Courses
  http://www.arrl.org/cce/courses.html#ec001
- Communications Academy
- Orientation to your local 911 center
- Create your own local net and practice regularly
- Be involved in county, regional, state nets
- Others (local and online)

Exercise

- Exercises are the backbone of a strong team
- Create exercises for practice
- Partner with other community events to assist them
  - They get communications, you get practice
- Encourage your local EM agency to use your members during disaster drills

Recognition and Encouragement

- Make sure your volunteers are recognized for the work they do
  - Newspaper articles
  - Certificates
  - Longevity
  - Team clothing
  - Recognition lunches/dinners
- Encourage volunteers to find their niche in your organization

Happy Volunteers

- Happy volunteers are the best way to encourage new volunteers
- Know what makes your individual volunteers happy
  - Recognition
  - Training
  - Participation
  - Mentoring
  - Responsibility
  - Others

Spontaneous Volunteers

- Spontaneous volunteers are the people you've never heard from before who want to help during a disaster
- If you have a plan for dealing with them, they are a valuable resource
- If you don't have a plan, they can bring your mission to a screeching halt
- Have a plan, stick to it

Volunteer Stress

- Stress among emergency response workers is a very real thing
- Volunteers are just as susceptible
- Make sure your volunteers are familiar with it
- Provide training on how to manage it
- Unmitigated incident related stress will cause some of your volunteers to leave and never come back

Conclusion

Keep your volunteers engaged and active and they will be happy and productive.

Additional Resources

- FEMA IS 244: Developing and Managing Volunteers
  http://training.fema.gov/EMIweb/IS/is244.asp
- CitizenCorps Recruitment Tips
  https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/prog-maintenance.shtm
- EMCOMM
  http://www.emcomm.org/
- Association for Public Safety Communications Officials
  http://www.apcointl.org

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